

MAINE PUBLIC HEALTH ALERT NETWORK SYSTEM



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TO: All Healthcare Groups

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SUBJECT: An Update for Healthcare Providers on the Potential for Q Fever Infection Among Travelers Returning from Iraq and the Netherlands

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Maine Center for Disease Control and Prevention (Maine CDC)
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An Update for Healthcare Providers on the Potential for Q Fever Infection Among Travelers Returning from Iraq and the Netherlands

Summary: The U.S. CDC recently issued a Health Advisory on the potential for Q fever infection among travelers returning from Iraq and the Netherlands.

Background: There have been increasing reports of Q fever among U.S. military deployed to Iraq. Travelers to these countries may have a higher likelihood of exposure to Q fever.

- Q fever in Iraq: Q fever is endemic in the Middle East. Since 2003, over 200 cases of acute Q fever have been reported among U.S. military personnel deployed to Iraq.
- Q fever in Netherlands: An ongoing outbreak of Q fever in the Netherlands that has been associated with infected dairy goat farms. Since 2007, over 3,700 cases of Q fever have been reported in the Netherlands. Q fever has not been identified in American travelers returning to the U.S.

Q Fever: Q fever is a zoonotic disease caused by *Coxiella burnetii*, a species of bacteria that is distributed globally. On average, 50-60 cases of Q Fever are reported annually in the U.S., with five or fewer cases reported annually in Maine. Q fever mainly affects cattle, sheep and goats, but can also affect cats. It can be passed to humans primarily by inhalation of these organisms from air that contains airborne barnyard dust contaminated by dried placental material, birth fluids, and excreta of infected herd animals.

The incubation period for Q fever is 2-3 weeks, with a range of 3-30 days. Clinical symptoms include sudden chills, retrobulbar headache, weakness, malaise, and severe sweats. Up to 60% of initial infections are asymptomatic. There is an acute and a chronic phase of disease. Diagnosis is made based on blood tests and clinical symptoms. Recovery depends on prompt diagnosis and early initiation of antibiotics.

Reporting: Q fever is a nationally notifiable disease in the U.S. In Maine, Q fever is reportable immediately by telephone to 1-800-821-5821 on the day of recognition or strong suspicion.

Recommendations: Healthcare providers in the U.S. should consider Q fever in the differential diagnosis of persons with febrile illness, pneumonia, or hepatitis who have recently traveled to Iraq or the Netherlands. Physicians are encouraged to submit samples of suspected Q fever for testing. Testing is available at reference labs and will soon be available at the Maine Health and Environmental Testing Laboratory (HETL).

The following is a link to the U.S. CDC Health Advisory:

<http://www2a.cdc.gov/HAN/ArchiveSys/ViewMsgV.asp?AlertNum=00313>.

For more information, see the Maine CDC website (below), the HETL website (below), or call the contact the Maine CDC at 1-800-821-5821.

Maine CDC: <http://www.maine.gov/dhhs/boh/ddc/epi/zoonotic/q-fever.shtml>

Maine HETL: <http://www.maine.gov/dhhs/etl/divisions.htm>